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IDLE HOURS.

THE picture by Mr. Smillie, which we engrave in the present number of *THE ALDINE*, tells its own story quite clearly enough to make any extended explanation of or comment on it entirely unnecessary on our part. The dreamy languor of the hot summer day; the gentle murmur through the scarcely moving branches of the trees—all the soporific influences of the time and scene are carefully reproduced and so vividly expressed that we feel their influence almost as much in looking at the picture as do the couple who are enjoying this tempting *dolce far niente*, albeit it may be doubted whether it is exactly a "sweet do nothing" in which they are engaged. Sweet enough it may be, and doubtless is; but we are inclined to think that, instead of nothing, they are doing something very dangerous indeed. Unless all the signs fail us, they are entering—if, indeed, they are not already started on—the road to a busy flirtation which may even end—who knows—in a matrimonial *dénouement*. We can fancy Cupid hidden somewhere in the shrubbery and chuckling to himself as he watches the success of his mischievous arms.

Mr. James D. Smillie, the painter of this charming picture, was born in New York in 1833, his father, Mr. James Smillie, having been a well-known engraver on steel, who came here from Edinburgh, Scotland. After his school-days young Smillie was put to work assisting his father, and acquired very thoroughly the art of engraving on steel, though he has not followed it for some years. Among other celebrated works he helped his father in the preparation of the large plates of Cole's "Voyage of Life," which are so well known to all our readers.

The subject of our sketch soon acquired considerable reputation as an engraver of landscapes on steel, and for several years gave himself up, almost entirely, to bank-note engraving—the most profitable branch of the art. There were not sufficient capabilities in this branch, however, to satisfy him; and, in 1862, on his return from a trip to Europe, he definitely gave up engraving, although he did not commence painting until 1864—two years later. In that year he took a studio with his younger brother, Mr. George H. Smillie, and in the summer made his first sketching tour to the Catskills.

In 1866 he was elected an Associate of the National Academy of Design; and in 1868, on the founding of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors, he was elected Treasurer, a post which he held until, in 1874, he was elected President—an office he still holds. In 1876 he was made, we are bound to say not undeservedly, a National Academician.

Mr. Smillie has great feeling for landscape—and especially for mountain scenery, which he is particularly fond of painting. He has also a great liking for animals, although he has not made them so extensively a matter of study as he has the peculiarities of mountain scenery. His largest water color was one exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, and represented "a scrub race" among some team horses out in the plains near the foot hills of the Rocky Mountains. It was an exceedingly spirited picture and deservedly attracted a good deal of attention. Another well-known picture of his, "How they Carried the Good News from Ghent to Aix," has been heretofore engraved in *THE ALDINE*.

Mr. Smillie divides his time about equally between oil and water colors, occasionally amusing himself

with a bit of etching or drawing on wood or stone for the engravers, or in making an Indian-ink drawing. He is a hard worker and shows constant advance, which might not always be the case with painters in general, no matter how many pictures they may have produced, nor how large a capital of talent they may have possessed at the outset.

ANDROMEDA.

THE exposure of Andromeda on the rocks has been made a frequent and favorite subject with artists of all sorts. Ingres and other French artists, besides several English artists, have chosen the subject for treatment in painting and in sculpture. The reason for this general selection of the subject is undoubtedly owing to the fact that it affords excellent scope for the reproduction of the nude without any suggestion of sensuousness.

The story of Andromeda is tolerably well known,

not long have hesitated between the handsome young warrior and the all-devouring monster, and she was glad enough to accede to the terms proposed. Perseus thereupon turned the monster into stone by a sight of his magic shield bearing the head of Medusa, and scared Phineas—who tried to interfere with the proposed arrangement—in the same way, finally carrying off his well-won bride. Afterward Andromeda was given a place among the constellations, where she may still be seen on a clear night by those who are sufficiently skilled in astronomy. Pliny declares the rocks where the maid was exposed to have been those near Joppa, and asserts that the skeleton of the sea monster was found there and brought by Scaurus to Rome, where it was carefully preserved—which we may be allowed to doubt.

Much speculation has been indulged in as to the real meaning of this mythological tale, and it has been conjectured that the story originated in the attempted carrying off of some maiden by a too-fierce lover in the shape of a wandering sea captain.

We need not quarrel, however, about the origin of a story which has given us so many excellent works of art as has this one. Mr. Westmacott's idea of representing her as seated is rather a novel one, but is not out of character, and gives opportunity for an exceedingly graceful posing of the limbs and the slight drapery. It will be observed that there is no contortion of the figure, and that the face expresses expectation, as she strains her sight for a glimpse of the coming monster, rather than agony or dread. At the same time, the chained ankles, and the rock on which she sits and to which she is bound, sufficiently attest her identity. Altogether the subject must be conceded to have been treated with great force and truthfulness.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

THE question is often asked, when a picture is sold for some notable sum "Is it worth it?" And, if we answer in the affirmative, the next query is ready in the shape of a "Why?"

For the most part these questions are asked by those who, having no particular knowledge of or feeling for art, can not know anything of the emotions which excite those who can and do feel a real sentiment of accord between themselves and the artists. At the same time it is

necessary that the question of worth should be fairly met for more than one reason.

In the first place, experience has shown that, in regard to pictures exhibited to the public, the judgment of that public was in the main correct, though attempts might be made to show that this popular decision was generally wrong, and that a reversal of it would do more even justice to both artists and people. Such attempts, however, before they could hope for success, must be based on works of art which, having received the popular commendation, had been proved to be intrinsically bad. We do not believe that many such works exist. This may seem like a particularly bold declaration in face of the fact that many bad—very bad—pictures are bought daily in our marts; that engravings, chromos and lithographs of the most miserable style of execution find a too ready sale; that oil paintings—so called by a misplaced courtesy—flourish among us to an extraordinary extent; but it is, nevertheless, the truth.

It is quite true that, in every farm-house, every country tavern, every city bar-room, and almost every humble home in the country we shall find engravings,



IDLE HOURS.—J. D. SMILLIE.

and yet is, perhaps, worth telling once more. She was the daughter of Cepheus, King of Ethiopia, and Cassiope, and was promised in marriage to her uncle Phineas, when Neptune drowned the kingdom and sent a sea monster to ravage the kingdom because Cassiope had boasted of being more beautiful than either Juno or the Nereides. This terrible consequence of female vanity and female jealousy of course put off all thoughts of Andromeda's marriage, and thoroughly frightened her parents—not the only instance, either in mythology or history, of similar consequences flowing from similar causes—and they rushed off to the Oracle of Jupiter Ammon, by which they were told that poor Andromeda must be exposed naked to the sea monster as the only way to appease the wrath of Neptune. She was accordingly chained to a rock, but before the sea monster had reached her Perseus came along, returning home victorious from his contest with the Gorgons. He was at once captivated by Andromeda's beauty, and offered to save her on condition that she should marry him. The unhappy father consented; and we may be sure the maiden, even if she had been in less dire strait, would

lithographs and chromos which outrage all the canons of art, and so are abominations in and of themselves, but this fact should not be taken as by any means upholding the theory that the popular judgment in regard to art works is always or even usually wrong.

People generally buy, not what they want, but what they can get. If, therefore, they are offered good works of art at a price which comes within their estimates of possible expenditure, they will greedily snap at them; while, at the same time, if they cannot obtain good works at rates within their means, they will take the best that offers—being bound to have pictures to ornament their walls at any rate. It is safe to say that the general craving is for good rather than bad pictures, and that he will best help in the creation of a correct taste in art who most assists in the diffusion of good pictures, and of sound criticisms on art in general, and on special pictures in detail. This is the office which THE ALDINE has assumed to itself and which it proposes to discharge.

So much for the first element in fixing the selling price of a picture—the popular estimate. Added to this there are several things to be taken into consideration by the knowing ones alone. For instance, it makes a difference whether an artist is dead or is still living. If living he may keep on painting, and may give us a better picture than any he has yet produced; while if, on the other hand, he be dead his best work has been done, and his pictures will acquire an additional value from the fact that we can get nothing more from his hand. At the same time death by no means releases an artist any more than it does an author from judgment on his works. The motto *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, does not in the least apply to a man's works in art or literature, even if it does—which is matter of doubt—to his other deeds. The works of dead artists, therefore, while worth relatively more than those of artists still among us, may not be of more positive value than those of living artists, and it is just here that the public judgment becomes worthy of notice. Not even the most knowing of the *cognoscenti* would try to reverse the opinion of the whole people in regard to any picture or any other work of art, however much he might differ from their decision. A picture may be, for instance, severely correct as far as all the rules of art are concerned; it may be well conceived and well executed, and yet lack the elements which appeal to the sympathies of humanity to such a degree that it shall entirely fail of moving the multitude, and so shall be a popular failure. Artistically speaking such a picture may be never so perfect, while, at the same time, its money value—which depends on its salability—is very near to nothing.

It is the popular liking for a picture which really fixes its worth; and though that popular liking may be in the judgment of artists and critics wrong, both artists and critics must in the end bow to it. It is a comfort, therefore, to think that this judgment is usually correct—in fact, it is not too much to say that the canons of art have had their origin in the popular opinion of pictures. In other words, it was not so much the artists who created public opinion as it was public opinion which gave the artists their eminence.

We must not be misunderstood, however, as meaning to assert that the judgment of the people on works of art is by any means always correct, or that an artist who has the approval of the million is necessarily a good one. We should not like to commit ourselves to any such style of criticism, or to any such fluctuating canons of criticism as public opinion might furnish. What we do claim is that in the long run the judgment of the people in regard to works of art is likely to be correct. What has been for ages praised is most probably good, and what has been as univer-

sally condemned is almost certain to be bad. It is on this popular opinion of the merits of an artist that the estimate of the value of his works must be based both because it is probably right, and because it will in the end govern, whether or not we like it. Thus, in the past year there have been sold in New York—to say nothing of what has been done in other cities of our country—several thousand pictures, at prices which aggregate very nearly a million dollars. Compared with that result, all talk about “business embarrassments” and “hard times” becomes a farce, a delusion and a snare.

In the celebrated Johnston collection, for instance, were two Meissoniers; one of which, eight by ten inches in size, painted in 1860, brought \$11,600, about \$145 the square inch; and the other, eight by



ANDROMEDA.—AFTER J. S. WESTMACOTT.

nine inches—or seventy-two square inches in measurement—was sold for \$8,600, or \$125 the square inch. Other pictures, better or worse than these in the judgment of artists, were sold at varying prices, in regard to which we have had occasion, heretofore, to express our opinion. What we want now to say is that the fixed rate in regard to the worth of pictures has not yet been determined upon, and that what a picture is worth is a matter in regard to which there can be no standard.

TALLAC PEAK.

In itself and its surroundings Tallac Peak is probably the most interesting in all the Sierra Nevada range. From its summit every variety of the grand, the picturesque, the peaceful, and the solemn in nature is visible.

Between Pyramid Peak and Tallac lies the Devil's

Basin, a terrible waste of granite rock, worn into mounds, moles, ramparts, and gashes, over which the foot of man has rarely, if ever, climbed. Here and there little lakes gleam from their basins of stone. Probaby there are also little streams running from these to the rivers without, but they are deeply sunken in their channels, and out of sight. The Devil's Basin is a picture of the world after a long and convulsive deluge. The gray granite seems almost blue with desolation. No animal life is there—an occasional hardy pine, growing in some cleft of the rock, is its only redeeming feature. Think of the rocky bed of some brook in the mountains, washed in pot holes and worn in furrows; multiply this indefinitely in extent, making it many miles in area, and you have the Devil's Basin, like the drained floor of some inland sea which has rocked and tossed in ceaseless currents for ages. In order to paint this the artist must have at his command the colors of a cold wintry sky. Whosoever has reproduced the vapory blue of the crevasse, or the chilling gloom of an arctic ice-field, may safely undertake this. But as for him of the softer spirit and gentler touch, it is well that he look elsewhere and take a warmer scene.

Such are within easy reach of the eye. That forest, for instance, is warm even in the short days of winter. It is interesting to compare this with the Devil's Basin, and note the wide difference of their temperatures, if distant pictures may be said to have temperature. A soft curl of smoke, loth to leave the branches of the former, reveals the spot where a band of lumbermen are hibernating. The trees themselves are not naked, but are comfortably clad in their great-coats of evergreen foliage. And the snow, falling slowly and in large flakes, seems to invite one to lie down and to go to sleep under the white mantle which it is spreading. Better, however, would the artist go to Tallac Peak in the summer, and dip his brush in the languor of some lake at rest. They are here of all sizes, dwindling from Tahoe, through Fallen Leaf, Cascade, Echo, Gilmore, and the Medley Lakes, down to the pool in the rock, as yet nameless, which is too shallow to be a harbor for trout.

Does the artist wish for forest scenes? On the flats and the lower skirts of the hills there are parks of timber so dense and so dim that the deer in them, like prisoners in dungeons, have forgotten the color of the sky. Does he need a cascade to add sparkle and “bead” to his picture, perhaps a trifle sombre otherwise? There they are, on every hand, leaping down the stairs of the mountains, gleefully, like children at play. Does he aspire to that sublimity which is the crown of the Sierras? The peaks, white with snow, fade into the white sky beyond, and it will be ample proof of his skill if he can define the scarcely perceptible line of horizon between.

Does he wish an excuse for indulging in those fantastic freaks of coloring to which the artists of Western scenery are so given? Here, then, on the face of Tallac Peak, is ground for the practice of his art, for this is peculiarly a mountain of many colors. No writer, using cold words alone, can ever approach a description of the mingled hues which dye its surface, float over it with the clouds, or play upon it in the sunshine. And as for the painters, I despair even while I try to hope. As for these painters, paradoxical as it may seem to say so, while they overdo yet they do not equal the scenes which they strive to represent. That is, while profusely liberal with those cardinal colors which they buy by the pound, yet they fall short in the tints and shades, of whose preparation and application Nature alone seems to know the art; and, in the result, we see a difference as great as that which exists between the gentle and genuine lady and the painted girl of the street.